

American Communal Societies Quarterly

Volume 9 | Number 3

Pages 223-228

July 2015

A Young Shaker Among the Eddys

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hamilton.edu/acsq>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#)

This work is made available by Hamilton College for educational and research purposes under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](#). For more information, visit <http://digitalcommons.hamilton.edu/about.html> or contact digitalcommons@hamilton.edu.

Document

The American Society for Psychical Research holds a remarkable collection of Shaker manuscripts at their research library in New York City. It is only fitting to close this issue, dedicated to the relationship between the Shakers and the Spiritualists, with the following account of an unnamed Shaker brother's visit to the Spirit Vale at Chittenden, Vermont. The visit occurred after William and Horatio Eddy had fallen out with each other, and the farm was occupied only by Horatio and his faction. The picaresque narrative was apparently written down by Elder Henry Blinn from a recounting given by the unnamed adventurer who walked the gloomy country roads seeking to witness spirit materializations. The manuscript was apparently later donated by Alonzo Hollister to the ASPR, as the docketed information supplied on a covering sheet is in his handwriting.

A Young Shaker Among the Eddys

We learn from his report that business arrangements called him to the city of Rutland, Vt. He was now within a short distance of the enchanted spirit "Vale" of which so many strange reports had been published, and his enthusiasm for the new and marvelous soon ripened into a determination to go & see the "spirits" and why not, and hear from their own lips the wonderful story of the land in which they dwell.

The stage was soon to leave for Chittenden a distance of eight miles, but our young athlete informed the driver that as he was unemployed he would leisurely walk on, and when the stage overtook him, he would accept a ride. The road seemingly passed through a very pleasant section of the country—every vale was a garden of beauty, and every hilltop a point of prospect from which [1] to view the still more lovely country beyond.

But the several species of trees that stood by the way heightened the interest of the journey as they more or less accepted the resurrection spirit of spring, and extended over the youthful pilgrim their large, beautiful branches reminding him so forcibly of the good Angels whose wings are ever over those who are in the path of duty. Here and there stood

a residence of some honest tiller of the soil. Hands to work seemed the characteristic feature of old & young and many of them was passed in silence. If perchance a word of salutation was exchanged it was friendly and genial, but rarely touched the absorbing subject of the traveler's mind.

After a journey of two hours during which time the stage had not been seen, the far famed land is reached where those who have passed from this world are recalled at one's bidding and in the twinkling of an eye became clothed with physical bodies, walking & talking like men in the flesh & as instantly dematerialized, dissolving [2] from view at the word of command. How trifling a distance, the space of eight miles when a reward so enchanting & withal so desirable is to be the compensation.

Fortunately, the manager of this spiritual order was at home, to whom no formal introduction was demanded. Horatio Eddy the medium, was busy at work in an adjoining orchard, transplanting some trees. The two strangers, having the good fortune to show genial & social dispositions were not long in forming an acquaintance. So congenial was the interview that in a few moments they were both busily engaged in the work of the orchard. After these duties were consummated they went into the house. It was an old building whose foundation was evidently laid in days of honest toil, but the whole structure was now slowly & silently dissolving from view.

The impression upon the mind as one enters is not unlike that which follows the reading of some of the ghost stories that are to be found in all the spiritual papers of today. [3]

Everything about the place bore a weird appearance & gave corresponding sounds to the ear. It was the home of the spirits of the departed. The effect upon the mind is magical. We look with all earnestness & listen with the utmost attention; we must not be deceived. Others may have been; but we shall observe with a close criticism all that transpires. Horatio passed through the halls & from room to room as would any ordinary farmer in his own private dwelling.

The mysticism which hung over the place was reserved for the visitors & not for the proprietor. In the parlor our young friend was introduced to two elderly ladies, who had for several days been anxiously waiting for an interview from some loved friend from the world to come, and as we shall subsequently learn, they did not wait in vain.

A young woman designated as the servant girl assumed the management of the affairs in the house who had occasional to come frequently into the parlor to look after some of the household pets, which consisted of a dog,

[4] a parrot, a canary, with other varieties of birds, and last though not least a sorry specimen of humanity one week old.

The last named pet, if we may so designate it was looked upon as a mysterious visitor, no one in the house bearing the euphonious title of father or mother.

But why mysterious? If the spirits of men & women can at the word of command be spoken into material form, it certainly would require less effort, on the part of either medium or spirits to materialize an infant. And if they have succeeded in holding their material form five minutes intact, they possibly may yet be able to hold them for five months.

History tells of a time when Jesus was materialized for thirty minutes on a visitation to a certain church, & the imprint of his foot upon the stone floor is still visible. It would almost seem that the traffic in “spirits” was conducted as is every other enterprise for worldly gain, — The more visitors [5] the more money to be gained, and of course an interest to hold the circles often & regularly. When our young friend heard that he was too early in this season, that no “sittings” was held at the present time, you may well imagine his disappointment. What, walk eight miles for the express purpose of seeing the familiar face of some dear friend who had passed beyond the boundaries of this world & thus be subjected to such a disappointment! This was unwelcome news. Horatio was earnestly solicited to make this a specialty in favor of the anxious minds at his home, and the kind hearted farmer as he is represented to be finally acceded to the wishes of the company, and consented to take some spirit pictures.

The first time was for one of the aged visitors and proved to be a picture of a shaker & a little child. No one recognized the features & the plate was held at a discount. The second time proved more successful & the aged lady saw in the picture a close resemblance to her beloved father who had [6] passed over the river many years ago. It resembled somewhat the Bible pictures of the old patriarchs and might have been received as a near relative to Moses the brother of Aaron. Still, as the good lady knew it to be her father, it must be as she says. Other pictures were obtained, some quite satisfactory to the parties. But when the time came to try for the shaker brother, the spirits would not act & the poor man failed to obtain the prize. Those who accept a picture, pay \$2 each

The advantages which the spirits have over the [?] of this world is that they use neither camera nor sunlight, & to present even the very shadow of deception, the medium allows the visitor to mark the plate before using,

In this case it seems that everything was perfectly satisfactory so far as the business associations were concerned. As it had been arranged that at the close of this spirit test, a materializing exhibition would be held at the house of the Hontoons, the company, except Horatio, all left for that place. It was now 1/2 p to 9 P.M., but as all these spirits seem to prefer darkness rather than light [7] the hour was quite favorable.

Although this family are always represented to be in very limited circumstances, we are pleased to learn that they are making some repairs & “fitting up” for the reception of visitors, both from this world & that to come.

Horatio, it is said has even built a new residence & will occupy it the coming season. It seems very singular that any person who has the power to bring to life those who have passed out of the world should remain in the bonds of poverty, while it is the universal desire of mankind to penetrate the future & learn what is beyond the boundaries of time. If this was an understood fact, they could not want for gold and silver & the treasures of this world. They would have no special season of the year in which to entertain visitors — the multitude would be ever at their door.

It is pleasant to know that a familiar conversation in the afternoon, with the host & hostess served to smooth the passage to a very successful exhibition. This proved the most interesting; it was a special favor, as well as a [8] kindness to the enthusiastic visitor. The audience room was some 12 or 15 ft of square. This answered ordinarily as kitchen & dining room & contained a cook stove, & table & several chairs. The floor was neither carpeted nor painted. A door led from this room into a bed chamber the size of which was some 7 x 6 ft. It was lighted by one window. The bed stood in one corner of the room, which the visitor was asked to examine that he might be assured there was no accomplice in the materialisation scheme. The clothes were forthwith thrown from the bed & a general inspection made of the room which was pronounced “all right” against the ingress of anything having flesh & bones. A violin, an accordion & a harmonica were left in the room for the use of the spirits. This our company were seated, which now consisted of the shaker brother, the two elderly ladies, the hired man, the servant girl, the medium & her husband. A black cloth was stretched across the doorway leading to the bed chamber reaching about 2/3 the distance from the floor. The space above this was covered with two curtains which could be thrown each way from the center & the cabinet was finished. [9]

As the medium was obliged to have one hand within the cabinet, her chair was placed near the door for this purpose while her husband sat in a distant part of the room to direct the light, making it more or less according to the medium's directions. Every thing being ready they all join in singing, "Shall we gather" &c "Tramp tramp tramp" &c Immediately the curtain of the cabinet parted & a hand was thrust out several times. The light is now very faint, and articles across the room are indistinctly seen. A face appears. Ah ! 'tis recognized as the dear father of one of the elderly ladies. She steps forward & shakes hands with the spirit which is able to speak only in a faint whisper. The conditions or influences are said to be somewhat confused. The spirit withdraws & the curtain drops. John Wilkes Boothe officiates as musician. He commences with a violin but is rather slow in tuning the instrument, finally plays "Dixie" improving every time the piece is repeated or as the materialized spirit grows stronger. This over, all the instruments are partially in tune & at the same time sailing about the room. It is well known that the spirits did all this because no one could enter the cabinet & that [10] the articles were floating through space from one part of the room to the other because the visitors heard them! Again the curtain parts & a face appears. It is that of a man of 40 yrs. He is the shaker's special friend. In the dim light it becomes difficult to see distinctly — the spirit cannot materialize sufficiently to enable it to speak as this requires several days trial. The medium asks if the spirit will try to materialize more fully. In response to this he leans forward & seemingly stares at the visitors. He will shake hands but this time the shaker must put his hand through the aperture to reach the spirit hand. When they meet the spirit draws the brother's hand in so suddenly that a momentary shudder comes over the mind. That the hand of a materialized spirit is identical with those in this world was evidenced at this time. It was the hand of a hard working man, & the callous places on the palms were very apparent. They now stood face to face distanced only some three inches, but still the person was not recognized. Next comes a young woman in the costume of a shakeress. She looks at the company, shakes hands with them & passes away, not however, til she shook hands with the brother. [11]

Again the curtain is thrown aside & out steps a man & woman of ordinary size. There they stand some 8 ft. distant as mute as two marble statues. — The man fashioned after the style of a Vermont tailor while the woman was the woman unmistakably a shakeress in her every article of apparel. It is no wonder that they were speechless. There they stood staring

at those who, as complementary were staring at them. Two minutes may have passed when they are again brought behind the curtain & once more a dead silence prevails. The medium announces the arrival of the Indian & instantly the yells & screams & whoops are almost bewildering. They could number no less than 20 persons. The medium remarked. "I am almost afraid they will scalp me." It is singular that the Indians are as much more readily developed than the whites. The former materializing so suddenly with flesh & bones & a voice equal to a Narraganset brave, while the latter stupidly present themselves without the least intelligence. This wild Indian orgy having exhausted itself the controlling spirit signified that the scene had closed. [12]

It is remarkable that through all this no harm was done to those in the body. The curtains of the cabinet were removed & the room was without an inhabitant. On the floor lay the musical instruments exactly where the spirits (?) had left them. All admitted that the developments had been remarkable & in fact almost unprecedented. The admittance fee being paid, which was \$1.00 each, the company was dismissed at 1/4 of 11 P.M. when one brother took up his line of march for Rutland with neither moon nor stars to light his path. Possibly they may not have been needed after such an illumination of the mind. He however reached the city at about 2 o'clock & was at the depot to take the cars at 4 o'clock the same morning.

May 16th, 1876

Written by H.C. Blinn

[docketed in Alonzo Hollister's handwriting]

Visit to the Eddys in Vermont by H. Clay Blinn May 16 1876